

Amendments to the Claims:

Claim 1 (previously presented): A mandrel for use in an automatic packaging machine, the mandrel comprising: a support plate having at least two pairs of elongated tracks, the pairs of elongated tracks being oppositely disposed, the elongated tracks of each pair being vertically aligned, a finger mounted to travel on each of the elongated tracks of the support plate, a cam follower for traveling in a cam track extending along a conveyor in the automatic packaging machine, the cam track having contours which guide and direct the cam follower as a function of an instantaneous position of the mandrel as it travels along the conveyor, rotary means responsive to the cam follower for moving at least two pairs of oppositely disposed fingers away from each other on the tracks, and resilient biasing means for pulling at least two pairs of oppositely disposed fingers closer to each other on the tracks to grip an object between the fingers, whereby the resilient biasing means tightens the grip, and movement of the cam follower along the contours overcomes the resilient biasing means and loosens the grip.

Claim 2 (previously presented): The mandrel of claim 1, wherein the fingers are operable to grip the object at any position along the length of the elongated tracks responsive to the resilient biasing means being enabled by the cam follower traveling in the cam track.

Claims 3-22 (canceled)